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ABSTRACT

Instead of merely correlating the amount of time a child is read to with gross measures of language development or reading achievement, researchers need to examine closely, through naturalistic studies, the underlying construction and organization of story book reading events between parent and child. The notion of scaffolding, in which the adult supplies a structure of supportive information that is gradually decreased as the child becomes less dependent, plays a large part in reading aloud to very young children. The pattern of interaction changes for older children, to one in which the adult expects the child to listen to particular segments of text, learn from the information contained in the material, and remember and convey the content to the adult in the questioning that follows each segment. This interactional pattern helps socialize some preschool children for reading instruction in school. Longitudinal studies of the effects of variations in parent-child interactions during story book reading can do much to further children's literacy development. (AEA)

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Learning About Learning to Read by Observing Parents Reading to their Children

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If we were to conduct a general poll on the topic of reading to children, it is likely that there would be overwhelming agreement that being read to is a good thing. Almost three-quarters of a century ago in his remarkable book The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading. Edmund Burke Huey said, "The secret of it all lies in the parents' reading aloud to and with the child" (p. 332). It, of course, was learning to read, and although Huey's statement may contain a degree of hyperbole, it also contains much more than a grain of truth.

We know, for example, that being read to at home is positively correlated with:

(a) language development in prereaders (Burroughs, 1972; Chomsky, 1972; Fodor, 1966; Irwin, 1960; MacKinnon, 1959).

(b) vocabulary development (Durkin, 1978; Department of Education and Science, 1975; Burroughs, 1972; Fodor, 1966; Templin, 1957).

(c) children's eagerness to read (Mason & Blanton, 1971).

(d) learning to read prior to attending school (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Teale, 1978).

(e) success in beginning reading in school (Moon & Wells, 1979; Walker & Kuerbitz, 1979; Durkin, 1978, 1974-75; Wells & Raban, 1978).

Thus, it seems fair to say that reading to children is an important area for study.

At first glance it would appear that a great number of studies have been done on this topic and that we have gained substantial insight from them. That is certainly the case, but we must bear in mind that the bulk of the research to date has been correlational in design and, as such, only really scratches the surface of the significance of reading to children. And I think that additional correlational research will likely not tell us much more than

we already know, viz., that being read to is positively associated with certain aspects of becoming literate. But, it is imperative that we go beyond this state of knowledge for we still have a great deal to learn.

I've entiled my talk today "Learning About Children Learning to Read by Observing Parent's to their Children". That's a rather convoluted way of saying that the study of children being read to at home can tell us much about the ontogenesis of literacy and about the process of reading itself, and thus can go far beyond the current state of the art in this area which has told us about correlations such as those just cited. What I would like to do today is examine a few excerpts from situations in which parents are reading to their children. The objective will be to give you some indication of (a) what we stand to learn by studying such situations, (b) a framework for how we might conduct research on this topic, (c) the issues which should be taken into consideration when doing this type of research.

A Research Framework

First, let me suggest a general framework for studying adults reading to children. Instead of merely correlating the amount of time a child is read to with gross measures of language development or reading achievement, I believe that we need to examine closely the underlying construction and underlying organization of story book reading[1] events.

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1. Of course, not all events in which a parent reads to the child involve books which contain a narrative account (story). Typically many of the books read to young children are books which have on each page a picture of an object or objects and the name (label) of the object(s); such books contain no story line at all. Throughout this article the term story book is used for convenience and consistency and is meant to represent any book used in an event where a parent reads to a child.

To illustrate this point let us look first at the very young child--in the one year old range (or perhaps younger). Children of this age are often read what might be called label books (e.g., ABC books or books which have a picture and the name of the object or objects portrayed). Here is a typical interaction around such a book:

1.1 Mother: Look at those (ATTENTIONAL VOCATIVE)

1.2 Child: (Focuses her attention on picture.)

1.3 M: What are they? (QUERY)

1.4 C: Monkeys. (LABEL)

1.5 M: Yeah, monkeys. (Smiles) (FEEDBACK, LABEL, FEEDBACK)

--Davidson Family Notes, February 1980

I describe this interaction as typical because it seems to be a pattern that many parents use when reading to their children. The parent first draws the attention of the child to the book (1.1 - Attentional Vocative) and then asks a question (1.3 - Query). The child responds (1.4 - Label), and finally the adult gives feedback on the response (1.5 - Feedback).

This pattern was first described in the work of Anat Ninio and Jerome Bruner who studied the achievement of labeling in a young middle-class child (Ninio & Bruner, 1978). They found that the child received a great deal of practice in learning how to label (or name) objects in book reading interactions. A segment of a book reading from Ninio & Bruner's study serves as an example:

2.1 Mother: Look! (ATTENTIONAL VOCATIVE)

2.2 Child: (Touches picture)

2.3 M: What are those? (QUERY)

2.4 C: (Vocalizes and smiles)

2.5 M: Yes, they are rabbits. (FEEDBACK and LABEL)

2.6 C: (Vocalizes, smiles and looks up at mother)

2.7 M: (Laughs) Yes, rabbit. (FEEDBACK and LABEL)

2.8 C: (Vocalizes, smiles)

2.9 M: Yes. (Laughs) (FEEDBACK)

What is very interesting in this latter example is that the mother supplies all four steps in the routine and in this manner "scaffolds" the dialogue, the result being that "The child finds out by the responses of adults what he is assumed to mean by what he says" (Holzman, 1972, p. 312). This scaffolding, Ninio & Bruner argue, enables the child to participate in the dialogue so that development in labeling, one of the activities being practiced in the event, can be achieved. Early on, therefore, the mother supplies to the interaction what she believes the child is intending to express.

That is to say, the parent, in responding to the child, constructs a structure which can be used in participating in book reading situations. We have also seen this scaffolding notion in other research. So, you see, what is going on is that the book reading event is being played out on the interpsychological plane, between parent and child. Then, as the child becomes competent at participating in this interaction, the parent 'raises the ante', the result being that the child gradually comes more and more to control the situation on an individual, or intrapsychological, level.

Of course, all this behavior on the part of the parent is generally accomplished quite unconsciously and thus the development can be described as natural. But it is a situation in which the mother is responding to the child, and the child is responding to the mother. The key point here is that social organization and social interaction of these book reading events are crucial facets which must be studied, for they give us insight into how the child develops to the point where he or she participates fully in (and eventually can accomplish on an individual level) the dialogue of the events.

Ninio & Bruner's research is most interesting for it gives insight into what goes on in interaction between parent and child in book reading events and proposes a framework which accounts for a particular aspect of how children learn in these events. Their findings contribute significantly to the endeavor to understand the organization and consequences of story reading events.

Let us skip now to story book reading events for some older children. Note this excerpt from an observational study of the literacy socialization of young children which a group of us at the University of California, San Diego are conducting:

3.1 Mother: They all started shouting excitedly, "I'll run a pet show!" Minnie decided, recalling all the different kinds of pets her friends owned. "We'll open a lemonade stand!" Morty yelled. "Right!" agreed Freddy. "Free ice-cold lemonade for everybody!" "I'll get my big balloon ready!" Donald cried, "I'll give everyone free rides!"

3.2 Krista: (Laughs)
(18 months)

3.3 M: Do you know what they're doing there?

3.4 David: What?
(3 yr. old)

3.5 Jenny: What?
(3 yr. old)

3.6 D: Selling lemonade...nade.

3.7 G: Uh-huh (yes). And how about here?

3.8 D: They're making a balloon go up.

3.9 G: They're going for a balloon ride. And how about here?

3.10 D: There's a kitty cat.

3.11 G: The pet show. They're having a pet show. Do you know what that is?

3.12 J: A bunny.

3.13 G: Yeah, do you know what that is?

3.14 D: [A skunk.

3.15 J: A skunk.]

3.16 G: What do skunks do?

3.17 D: Stink.

3.18 G: They stink.

3.19 D: Yea.

3.20 G: What's that?

3.21 J: Turtle.

3.22 D: A turtle.

3.23 G: Turtle?

3.24 D: Bird.

3.25 J: Bird...dog.

3.26 D: Dog.

3.27 G: Then Donald's nephews offered their new playground equipment for the children. "They can use your seesaw!" said Huey. "And our swing!" said Dewey. "And our slide!"

added Louie. They're all playing. Having a good time, huh?

3.28 J: What do they do?

3.29 G: I don't know, let's see. "Those are all great ideas," Mickey said. "What about you, Goofy? What's your idea for the Best-Neighbor Contest?" "Shucks, I don't know," Goofy answered, "But I'll try to think of something." With a faraway look in his eyes, he turned and walked off toward his house. So, what were they doing?

3.30 J: Playing.

3.31 G: They were playing.

3.32 J: Playing in the back yard.

3.33 G: Uhuh (yes).

3.34 J: I, I, I, know what they...there's a teeter totter, swing, slide...(pointing to each on page).

3.35 G: You like to live in the park...and play? Huh?

In this example the on-going dialogic questioning characteristic of earlier examples has been modified somewhat. Instead the adult expects the child to listen to particular segments of text, learn from the information contained in the material, and remember the content so that it can be conveyed to the adult in the questioning which follows each text segment.

This pattern of interaction in which the adult reads and then asks questions about the content of what was read was first described by Shirley Brice Heath in her community studies of literacy conducted in the Carolinas (Heath, 1980; in press). She found that at about the time when the child was three years of age this interactional style began to develop, both among the families in a working class white community and among the sample of fifteen middle class primary school teachers and their own sons and daughters. Furthermore, Heath points such a pattern of interaction is similar to the Initiation-

Reply-Evaluation (IRE) sequence described by such researchers as Mehan (1979), Griffin and Humphrey (1978), and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as being an integral feature of classroom discourse.

So what we are seeing is that for certain children the interactional pattern of their preschool experience in story book reading events helps socialize them for participating in reading instruction in school. This is not a coercive thing on the part of the parents, but a part of the nature of everyday activities for these children. However, it must also be borne in mind that this is not the nature of everyday activities for all children. For too long in this line of research we have treated all instances in which children are read to as being equal--the only difference being in the amount which they were read to. Of course, there are differences in the amount the children are read to. We have noted this in our observations (Teale, Estrada & Anderson, in press) and Heath has seen a vast range also. But, importantly, there are also differences in the way in which the interactions are played out--and it is these <u>qualitative</u> differences which we also must attend to in order to understand more completely how children learn and what they learn by being read to.

Note these three excerpts from story book reading events:

Excerpt 4

4.1 Mother: Baby kittens [love play...
4.2 Child: [baby kittens
4.3 M: Ok. Baby [kittens love playing on the farm.
4.4 C: [(Mumbles----------) farm.

4.5 M: At [night the farmer gives them fresh cow's milk and they curl up together-

4.6 C: night]
(mumbles----------

4.7 M: --in the big red barn.

4.8 C: ----------) red barn.

4.9 M: Ok.

4.10 C: Lookit Mommy.

4.11 M: Ok. Baby rabbit--

4.12 C: Baby rabbit--

4.13 M: Ok. Lives in a [hutch which--

4.14 C: --in a hutch]

4.15 M: Ok. Which, in his tiny little house--

4.16 C: Lives in hutch in house--

4.17 M: --he [sniffs noses with, with the kittens and puppies because they are all friends

4.18 C: sniffs noses
kittens and puppies] .....

Excerpt 5

5.1 Father: "Possum," they cried, "Can you show us the trail?" But Possum just-[snored--

5.2 Child: POSSUM!]

5.3 F: --as he hung by his tail. The bumblebees bumbled, the duml--the doo-do bugs do-doed, the loon lung and laughed and the owls only "Wooed!" "The owls are supposed to be wise," said the mice.

5.4 C: WHOOOOO!

5.5 F: "Speak nicely to one and they'll give you advice."

5.6 C: EEEEEEE!

5.7 F: So Bambi spoke nice to one grumpy owl who answered wisely with rather a growl. "Run that way, my boy, till you come to a lake, and there you'll discover the trail you should take. But hurry...(continues reading text)..."I can tell you, just leave it to me! Stop wondering which of the trails you should take, just follow your nose and you'll come to the lake."

5.8 C: Lake.

5.9 F: And since it was off, and since that was all he could take time to say, he picked up an acorn and hurried away. They followed their noses and raced on ahead and there was a lake so the sq--as the squirrel had said.

5.10 C: Nope.

5.11 F: On top of a lily [pad--

5.12 C: pad--]

5.13 F: --almost unseen, sat something quite lumpy and shiny and green. What's that?

5.14 C: Oh (pauses) Frog?

5.15 F: A WHO!?

5.16 C: Frog.

5.17 F: Yeah, that's a frog. Said Bambi, "Where are you?"...

Excerpt 6

6.1 Mother: And when the rain forgets to come down, who cares! We'll just make our own. What are they doing?

6.2 Child: Umm. They're pouring what?

6.3 M: Right! They're pouring what?

6.4 C: Pouring water.

6.5 M: They are! Oh, do you like that?

6.6 C: Yeah.

6.7 M: And suddenly one day our garden is full of delicious vegetables, ripe and ready to eat. Hurry! Hurry! We must pick them now. You turn the page? Come, look at what we grew! And we have so much, enough for us all and all our friends too! What are you doing?

6.8 C: I'm eatin' 'em.

6.9 M: Are you gobbling them all up?

6.10 C: Un-huh.

6.11 M: Can you tell me what some of those vegetables are? Can you show me where the tomatoes are? (C. points) And where's the lettuce? (C points) No, that's not the lettuce.

6.12 C:

6.13 M: Where's the lettuce? Where's the lettuce that we make salad out of? (C points) It's corn. What's that right there?

6.14 C: Lettuce!

6.15 M: Lettuce. That's right. Can you show me where the turnips are? (C points) Right there. Those are the turnips.

In Excerpt 4 we have an interactional style where the adult reads the text and the child, in a sense, attempts to choral read with the adult. In Excerpt 5 there is no choral reading; rather the adult reads along and the child will

occasionally repeat the final word in certain phrases or segments. Note that in both of these examples the adult does not interrupt the reading to ask questions or make comments. In Excerpt 6 we have what is a prime example of a story book reading event which mirrors the IRE sequences of the classroom. It is these types of differences in interactional patterns which promise to tell us much about the differing typification of reading with which children arrive at school.

We need to examine specifically the consequences of such variation in the social organization of story book reading events. In her work, Heath, found interesting differences between the working class families and middle class families, differences which, in part, account for the difficulty which the working class children, as a group, had in achieving literacy in school (whereas the middle class children did not). I do not have time today to detail those differences, but I would say that they suggest strongly that we need to attend closely to the sociocultural variations in story book reading events. Unfortunately I have no answers as to how--or to what degree of significance--these differences in the way story book reading events are realized in various families affect children's orientations to literacy. We are just attempting to begin to study on that now. However, I do think that this is a fruitful area for study and by going beyond mere correlational approaches to research in this area to investigating carefully from a process point of view what it is that parents and children <u>do</u> in these events, we stand to learn a good deal about the significance of reading to children.

Essential for further inquiry in this area are:

(1) Additional interactional descriptions of the activity of story book reading.

(2) More specifically as regards causal relationships which between experience in being read to and development in literacy.

(3) More information on the effects which diversity in the social organization of story book reading events has on children's typifications of literacy.

Such data sources can act in complementary ways to provide insight into the understandings about the processes and conventions of reading and writing which children can gain from participation in story book reading events. For example, the only way we have of learning what, for the child, are the actual consequences of being read to, is to conduct longitudinal research which both details the interactions that constitute such events for particular children and identifies strategies those children subsequently use in attempts to comprehend or produce written language.

Also, the detailed descriptions of story book reading events are necessary for they provide sources of information from which we can draw conclusions about the nature of activity which seems most felicitously to further children's literacy development. An endeavor which should be of central concern in reading education research is arriving at a theory of how individuals in the home and school environments might best aid the child who is learning to read and write. Smith (1973) has said that the dynamics of the approach should be to "respond to what the child is trying to do." In a very real sense Smith's maxim says everything, and it says nothing. Still necessary is a theory which is at once more specific and at the same time ecologically valid, viz., consonant with what we know about how children learn in general and with

how they learn language in particular. Such additional specificity bears directly on research into story book reading for it would provide a means for helping make visible to teachers and parents what it is that good "teachers" do in their interactions with children during story book reading events that is so helpful to the children.

One theoretical approach which deserves special attention in the quest for an account of the mechanisms of story book reading events and their relations to subsequent literacy processes of the child is that of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky saw intellectual skills as growing out of social interactions in the service or practical activity. Thus, literacy learning could be viewed as being the result of the ways in which children interact with others in specific problem solving environments in which reading and/or writing are a part. He argued that the social interactions which comprise an activity come to constitute that activity on an intrapsychological plane for the individual child.

Independent functioning, then, follows a period during which the child engages in collaboration with an adult or more experienced member of the culture. Interestingly this seems to be the case with being read to (Holdaway, 1979; Doake, 1977). Initially, the "other-regulation" may be almost totally provided in the interaction by the adult [as can be seen in Ninio & Bruner's (1978) notion of scaffolding]. However, as the child begins to function in settings involving other-regulation, the adult gradually 'raises the ante' and removes certain of the scaffolding, causing the child to assume more responsibility for completing the task. This practice continues until the child can conduct the activity independently.

This process occurs in learning situations which Vygotsky termed the zone of proximal development. He describes the zone of proximal development as:

> The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

In an analysis of a situation in which adults helped children construct puzzles, Wertsch (in press) shows how adults negotiate the zone of proximal development with children, gradually "luring" the children further and further into the task until, ultimately, the transition to self-regulation is complete.

The notion of zone of proximal development and of "developmental scaffolding" would seem to offer a potentially powerful theoretical account of the organization and consequences of story book reading. What are now needed are longitudinal studies of children which would investigate the progress toward self-regulation in this domain.

Furthermore, the idea that a process first appears on the social plane as an interpsychological category and subsequently appears within the child as an intrapsychological category and subsequently appears within the child as an intrapsychological category is especially pertinent to the issue of diversity in the social organization of story book reading events. Vygotsky took a strong stand on the issue of the social origins of cognition. He argued that the specific means used to organize and mediate a process on the social level played a crucial role in determining how this process would be conducted on the individual level. Therefore, we should expect that significant differ-

ences in how parents read to their children would contribute to a certain degree to differences in the children's orientations to literacy. Such an expectation underlines the need for detailed accounts of what occurs in story book reading events, for these accounts are essential to the enterprise of determining what constitutes variation in reading to children.

Thus, there remains a great deal to be understood about the organization and consequences of reading to children. However, this area of research promises to tell us much about how children do learn to read. The present research climate which is encouraging naturalistic studies of child development is reason to suspect that our insight into this topic will deepen significantly in the coming years.

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